

BULLYING AND ITS EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This paper discussed bullying and its effects on Secondary school students in Nigeria and counselling implications. The paper highlighted that bullying in schools in Nigeria is a phenomena that has serious psychological consequences for victims; these include low psychological well-being, poor social adjustment, psychological distress and physical illness. Some of the major causes identified are; defective or wrong-upbringing of children, peer group influence among others. Identifiable effects were highlighted as, fear and tension in victims, refusing to go to the school on the part of victims etc. among the recommendations of the paper are that, each of every secondary school should have anti-bullying policies and to take appropriate measure to stamp it out.

Introduction

Bullying among students of secondary school occur world wide, among all problems of secondary school, none is as debilitating as bullying because of its effect on the bully and the victim as well. Bullying is a pattern of behaviour in which one individual is chosen as the target of repeated aggression by one or others; the target person (the victim) generally has less power than those who engage in aggression (bullies) (Baron & Bryne, 2005). Social psychologists in their definitions say that bullying is a psychological violence; a sustain aggression that strips a person of control and dignity (Paszkievicz 2010). Based on this definition, the researcher will accentuate that bullying is using power to hurt or humiliate another person.

Bullying is rampant in our secondary school and it has a lot of effects on the students. It is difficult to discover a secondary school today where bullying does not exist. According to the Journal of the American Association; out of more than 15,000 public school student

surveyed in the United States, nearly 30 percent reported occasional to frequent involvement in bullying, whether as a bully, a target or both. In the United Kingdom, the British School Health Education unit found that a quarter of 10 - 11 years old survey were bullied either every day or "often", another report says that 15 percent of Australian children admit to have being bullied weekly, the case with Nigerian schools may not be different if appropriate statistic is taken. These figures can be higher in percentage depending on how one defines the problem and view its prevalence. If we will accept nicknaming children and excluding them from games as bullying, then these figures we see would get up to 100 percent.

The characteristic of bullying has two basic facts. Firstly, research on bullying indicates that relatively few children are purely victims or purely bullies, rather a large number play both roles, they bully some students, and are bullied in turn by others (Vermande, Oart, Goudenard Rispens 2000). Secondly, bullying seems to be common all around the globe. Baron & Bryne (2005) asserted that, on this topic bullying has been truly international in scope and has been examined the occurrence of bullying in many cultures. Bullying is plied out with alarming frequency nowadays and bullies and their victims may be of either gender.

Consequently, concerns of parents, policymakers, educators and the public have escalated in awareness that bullying has serious damaging effects for bullies, victims, schools and communities. Countries around the world with the rise in the reported incidents of violence and the links that have been established between violence and bullying. In the Western world much attention has been devoted to stemming the act of bullying but in Nigeria this act goes on in many schools unnoticed (Bonke, 2009). Bullying has been defined variously by researchers. According to Lunmdtti cited in Bonke, 2009, bullying occurs when a person willfully and repeatedly exercises power over another with hostile or malicious intent. A wide range of physical or verbal behaviours of an aggressive or antisocial nature are encompassed by the term bullying. These include insulting, teasing, abusing verbally and physically, threatening, humiliating, harassing and mobbing.

Pepler and Craig (2000), cited in Bonke (2009) observed that bullying is the most common form of violence, it is what drives the culture of violence, permitting the most powerful to dominate the less powerful. Nickel (2005) and Bonke (2009) also defined bullying as the "intentional", unprovoked abuse of power by one or more children to inflict pain or cause distress to another child on repeated occasions. Bullying is a growing and significant problem in many schools around the world. It is the experience among children of being a target of aggressive behaviour of other children who are not siblings and not necessarily age mates.

Generally, students who get bullied can be regarded as being passive or being submissive victims. They are usually quiet, careful, sensitive and may start crying easily. They are unsure of themselves and have poor self-confidence of negative self-image (Oghiagbephan, 2010). A broad definition of bullying as opined by Olweus, 1993; Coloroso, 2002 and Bonke, 2009, is when a student is repeatedly exposed to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. These physical actions can take the forms of physical contact, verbal abuse or making faces and rude gestures. Spreading rumours and excluding the victim from a group are also common forms of bullying. These negative actions are not necessarily provoked by the victim for such action to be regarded as bullying; an imbalance

in real or perceived power must exist between the victim and the person who victimizes him or her.

TYPES OF SCHOOL BULLYING

School bullying can be Physical, verbal or emotional and is usually repeated over a period of time (Wikipedia, 2010). Example of physical bullying include: Causing physical injuries, punching, shoving, slapping, attacking, fighting, degrading e.t.c. Emotional on the other hand include: Spreading malicious rumors about people, harassment, provocation, whispering to another in front of someone, getting certain people to gang up on others e.t.c . There is also what is called verbal bully, example of verbal bullying include: name-calling diverting foul language at the target, harassment, tormenting, commenting negatively on someone's look, clothes body e.t.c. another type of bullying is the cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying occurs when someone bullies through the internet or mobile phones (Wikipedia, 2010). Examples of cyber bullying include: posting inappropriate pictures or messages about others in blogs on web sites, using someone else username to spread rumors or lies about someone.

CAUSES OF SCHOOL BULLYING

The factors that cause school bullying are many and they can be classified into two: environmental and psychological factors. One of the major factors that cause school bullying is defective or wrong upbringing. In society there are often found home in which discipline is either too harsh, especially if corporal punishment is frequently resorted to, or too lenient, especially if the child is always permitted to do all that he wishes especially bad deeds without any one deterring him, these extreme cases of upbringing are defective because they lead to lack of internalization of right or correct behaviour by the child. Consequently the child grows up unable to discriminate right behaviors from wrong one. Children can become bullies because they want to fit in or perhaps they have a difficult situation at home, so in order to feel better about themselves they inflict misery on someone else (Bello, 2002). This means home background or environment the child has grown up in can determine how he or she behaves and interact with others. Therefore a stable home life and good adult role models can really affects how a child behaves and interact with others in school and in others places outside of their home and even how he or she will be as an adult (Bello, 2002). In the same vain, Omoteso (2010) observes that parents who model aggression as a way of meeting their needs or who use harsh or aggressive method of discipline are significantly more likely to have children to engage in aggression. Maliki, Asagawa and Ibu (2009) observed that family influences on the development of aggression that had been examined include among others parenting techniques, example harsh and inconsistent discipline.

Another environmental cause of bullying which psychologists identified is poor parent-child relationship. Omoteso (2010) has cited a number of research findings that support the assumption that children who are not very well attached to their parents are more likely to bully their peers. While children who have positive relationships with their parents are less likely to participate in bullying.

Another important factor that causes bullying in school is peer group influence. Children and adolescents are known to move about with their mates known as peer group. The composition of peer group is made up of children from different background, for this reason it is likely that ill-behaved or bad eggs is often found in the group whose influence often leads to criminal tendencies by the group like bullying, petty stealing e.t.c.

From psychological point of view, there are certain personality traits that make a child to become bullied. These personality traits include anger, jealousy, aggression, insensitivity, low self-esteem, cruelty, the desire to control others by all means and lack of self-confidence (Willims, 1993). Another personality trait is lack of social skills that leads to difficulties in managing positive relationship (James, 2010). Another personality traits associated with bullies is impulsiveness (Cheever, 2010). This means if a child is impulsive; the tendency is that he/she will be bullied.

Effects of Bullying

The effects of school bullying are pervasive and far-reaching. From mental point of view, a child's self-esteem can be severely impacted even years after bullying has stopped. The victims of bullying may suffer from depression, particularly if the bullying has occurred over a long period of time (Laneaux, 2010). It should be recognized that this mental effects do not stop at the bullied, they also extended to the bullies. According to Omoteso (2010) studies have shown that those involved in prolonged and serious bullying of others experience wide range of mental health, academic and social problems. He also pointed out that studies point to the connection between bullying and sexual harassment and violence in later years.

Another effect of school bullying is on school work. After repeatedly facing a bully, a child may begin to refuse to go to school. His grades may also suffer, both because of absenteeism and his inability to concentrate (Laneaux, 2010). School bullying affects the relationship between the bullied and his or her parents or guardians. The relationship between a parent and the child who is being bullied may be strained because of the child's hostility towards school. For instance, a child may blame his or her parents for forcing him to go to that school (Laneaux, 2010). Also the child may begin asking you (parent) for more allowances and lunch funds money if the bully is demanding money from him.

According to Wikipedia (2010) victims of bullying can suffer from long term emotional and behavioural problems. Bullying can cause loneliness, depression, anxiety, lead to low self-esteem and increased susceptibility to illness.

School bullying also has physical effects. Bruises, scratches and scars can mean a child is being bullied. Aside from the normal bumps and scrapes that young children get from playing, excessive marks should be investigated. Also a loss of appetite or sleep is common as a result of the fear and anxiety that bullying cause (Laneaux, 2010). Bullying also affects the friendly relationship of the victim and his or her friends. A child may isolate himself or develop a general distrust of people. He may also seek revenge on his bully or feel justified in attacking other children to relieve stress or anxiety (Laneaux, 2010).

Bullying is a problem for bullies, victims, peers, schools, classmates and the community at large. To the bully, the act of bullying gives pleasures and occupies most of his time. The time and energy that should be used in studies is now directed to mischief, hence, poor academic performance. In a bullying situation there is always fear and tension for victims. This tense atmosphere creates no room for peace. Learning can never take place effectively in an unpeaceful environment. Bullying has a very detrimental effect on children especially on the victims who can become school-phobic (Martins — Umeh and Ndubuaku (ed) in Nnachi and Ezeh, 2003),

Furthermore, for bullies, aggression may persist into adulthood in the form of criminality, marital violence, child abuse and sexual harassment. For victims repeated bullying can cause psychological distress and many other allied problems. The problem of bullying goes beyond the bullies and their victims to the peers and even the entire community. Through life, bullying gives room to an atmosphere of fear, dread and victimization.

Developing a safe and supportive school climate; this is an important starting point for counsellors is to realize that much bullying occurs without the knowledge of teachers and parents, and that many victims are very reluctant to tell adults of their problems with bullying (Egbochuku, 2007).

Intervention Strategies /Recommendations for Implementation

To be effective, bullying intervention must focus beyond the aggressive child and the victim to include peers, school staff; parents and broader community. Inappropriate behaviour should be discouraged. Children should be given the reason why their behaviour is inappropriate which is enough to change their behaviour. According to Martins — Umeh and Ndubuaku in Nnachi and Ezeh (2003) indicated that another way to curb the incidence of bullying among children is by creating equal opportunity policies. Every child should have equal access to all activities as well as their teachers, head teacher (Principals) and other non-teaching staff of the school. Children's background should be recognized and respected. In playgrounds, staff should provide play schemes with regard to inculcating morals, by being positive role-models. Children at playground should be encouraged to take responsibility of their own behaviour and the well-being of other playmates. The role of the family in prevention and decreasing of the occurrence of bullying is that parents and other adult members of the family should serve as good models.

Again, there is need for communication between parents and the schools, as parents are often the first to notice trends that their children are being victimized. The students should be meant to understand the implications of bullying through talks and moral instruction. Peer play vital role in bullying. Interventions must gear towards change of attitudes, behaviours and norms around bullying for every child in the school.

In addition, the larger society or community should shun the act of cheap popularity gained by solving social problems via aggression. In other words all forms of aggression and its consequent antisocial behaviours should be frowned at.

Implications for Counselling

As one of the most persistent and destructive forms of aggression in the continuum of violence, bullying deserves the attention of everyone. Reducing and preventing bullying requires the joint efforts of the policymakers, administrators of schools, teachers, students, parents and community members. Thus, for bullying to be reduced to its barest minimum level, the following recommendations are made:

1. The schools and home should work with the counsellor collaboratively to instill good values in their children/students.
2. The counsellor should inform parents to have skills and knowledge in classroom management and control.
3. There should be school-wide education, training and bullying prevention programmes, through behaviour modification theories.

4. The school should provide counselling and support for students at risk of being involved in bullying.
5. Students who bully often need intensive support or intervention, so it is important for schools and social service agencies to work together.
6. The counsellor and teachers must recognize the danger of violent films and discourage their children/students from watching them and use insight training to stop such viewing.

The counsellor as a personality for therapy should cease the act of laziness in effecting his/her behaviour lapses. If the counsellor is functional, the cases of aggressive anti-social behaviours will be reduced to a very large extent. The teachers, housemasters, housemistresses, principals etc are not left out of this helping situation. Be that as it may, the following are some counselling implications that could be implemented for the betterment of all:

1. The counsellor should endeavour to explain to the students in group guidance/counselling that bullying is never acceptable.
2. Organize a school conference day devoted to bully or victim's problem.
3. Increase adult supervision in the school premises, halls, hostels, washrooms, more radiantly.
4. Emphasize the consequence of hurting others.
5. Emphasize caring, respect and safety of all the students in the hostels and the classrooms.
6. Enforce consistent and immediate consequence for aggressive behaviour.
7. Follow-up in all instances of aggression, violence and bullying.
8. Encourage positive pair relation and teach co-operative learning activities. The bully and the victim need help and they need to learn to relate to others without the abuse of power. The bully needs to be monitored and taught to communicate properly.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is believed that bullying in Nigerian schools like in other parts of the world, is a phenomenon that has serious psychological consequences for the victims, including low psychological wellbeing, poor social adjustment, psychological distress and physical illness. The environmental and psychological factors that encourage bullying in schools have been explored, this is because understanding the causes of a problem is the first step in addressing it. Understanding why bullying happens in schools will make it easy for parents and guardians to help their children from becoming the victims and ensure that their children do not become bullies themselves. In the light of the above conclusion, the following suggested solutions to the problem of school bullying in Nigeria are offered:

- 1) Each and every secondary school should have anti-bullying clubs and to take appropriate measure to stamp it out.
- 2) Adult literacy classes should include education of parents on proper upbringing of children whereby they should learn that the ultimate criteria for the appropriateness of behaviour is whether it is in accord with African traditional and religious values.
- 3) Schools should endeavour to provide guidance services to address problems of bullies and bullied.
- 4) Parents and guardians should play an active role in their children's lives. Talk to them every day, know their friends and offer support by listening to them.

- 5) Parents should help their children learn ways to react to bullies that will likely diffuse the situation. Parents should not encourage their children to be aggressive or fight back. Instead, encourage their children not to appear sad or fearful. This is because passive acceptance of the bully's demands is what the bully always tries to achieve.
- 6) School administrators, teachers and parents should realize the danger of films and video games that are filled with graphic depiction of violence and discourage their children and students from watching them. In the same vein, they should discourage their children and students from reading newspapers, magazines and listening to radio stations that are filled with stories of murders, rapes and robberies.
- 7) If bullying occurs, parents should alert the teachers to what is happening and work together with teachers and the school heads to create a plan to address the problem.
- 8) Parents should have moral courage to challenge school heads to better protect their children. Parents should contact their representatives at both state and national assemblies about introducing anti-bullying legislation.
- 9) Government should censor films both local and international with a view to curtailing those that are detrimental to the well-being of our school students

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